

**The Role of Honors College Summer Orientation in Freshman Expectation and Satisfaction:**

**A Pretest- Posttest Survey**

**An Honors Thesis (PSYS 499)**

**by**

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# Abstract

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*Keywords:* orientation, satisfaction, perception, honors, first-year student

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Orientation is one crucial part of the adjustment to college life that aids incoming freshmen, and the majority of universities utilize it as a tool in this way (Tinto, 1999). The impact of orientation on students' adjustment in terms of their expectations about university life can vary and affect their resulting satisfaction with the reality of their first semester experience (Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, & Alisat, 2000; Tinto, 1999; Oliver, 1980; Scutter, Palmer, Luzeckyj, Burke Da Silva, & Brinkworth, 2011; Athiyaman, 1997). Understanding the importance of the format, components, and expectations created at orientation and other education preparation programs can allow for better understanding of the student participants' perceptions, as well as assist in evaluating in the effectiveness of the program.

Previous studies have examined how orientation relates to stress and adjustment in samples of entire campus populations; however, there has been little research done to determine how orientation impacts the expectations and satisfaction of sub-groups within a university (Pancer et al., 2000; Jackson, Pancer, Pratt, & Hunsberger, 2000). The current study will collect data from a sub-group of incoming Ball State Honors college students to determine if their Honors College related expectations and resulting satisfaction levels differ. Based on findings in the area, it can be predicted that there will be a correlation between the effectiveness of program in creating accurate expectations and the students' satisfaction levels after the completion of their first semester (Athiyaman, 1997; Oliver, 1980).

### **Individual Differences**

**Expectations and Perceptions.** Pancer et al. (2000) found that students with more accurate expectations of university life appeared to have reduced stress, and this lower amount of



stress resulted in the students adjusting better to university life as they entered their freshman year at an institution. This finding implies that a realistic view of what their college experience will entail could benefit students in multiple areas, and provides support for the argument that universities should do all that they can to prepare their new students with accurate expectations. According to a collection of studies in this field, students typically have inaccurate expectations about level of feedback received at college, the extent of the academic load, access to educators, and the amount of individual responsibility they have for their own education (Brinkworth, McCann, Matthews & Nordström, 2009; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Thalluri & King, 2009).

People form attitudes about concepts as they learn about them (Fishbein, 1967). As incoming students prepare for college at orientation, it is one of the largest opportunities for them to learn about the institution they will attend. The importance of students' initial attitudes and expectations is in their impact on later satisfaction (Athiyaman, 1997). Therefore, following the claims of Fishbein (1967) and Athiyaman (1997), early exposure is one of the most effective times to create accurate views that will lead to attitudes which reflect correct information that will result in students who are more satisfied. Subjective disconfirmation theory explains the relationship between a student's expectations of a school and their subsequent perception, or assessment of, the reality of the experience (Athiyaman, 1997). Subjective disconfirmation is a process between consumers', or students', standards prior to an experience and their evaluations of the actual experience (Taylor and Hunter, 2002). Confirmation is a possible outcome of subjective disconfirmation theory in which expectation level is accurately matched to the service that was experienced. Disconfirmation is a possible alternate outcome of subjective disconfirmation that indicates that there was a discrepancy between the expectation and the actual experience that was had based on a service that was provided. If a student has high initial

expectations that are not met, the result is a negative disconfirmation. If expectations are low compared to the experience that exceeds those expectations, positive disconfirmation occurs. In the situation that matches an accurate level of expectation with the corresponding level of satisfaction with an experience, confirmation occurs (Oliver, 1980; Oliver, 1977). According to Tse and Wilton (1988) disconfirmation and expectation can be assessed because of their direct relationship.

### **Satisfaction**

Zhao and Kuh (2004) found that students who are involved in engagement activities during their first year on campus had more overall satisfaction with their college experience than students who were less engaged. This finding with freshmen students stayed true with graduating students as well, which means that students who are engaged in school and learning communities early tend to continue that pattern throughout their time in college (Zhao, & Kuh, 2004). Because the Ball State Honors College is one such example of a learning community that focuses on engagement, communication, faculty access, and housing these results have implications for the importance of orientation in the initial stages of engagement as an educational preparation program.

### **Orientation Components**

In a review of 273 different colleges' orientation programs, Robinson, Burns, and Gaw (1996) found that there are certain aspects of an orientation program that result in better transition and integration of students to the college. According to their study, a few of the identified aspects that differentiate the high-quality programs are style of advising and level of engagement. These identified components were again supported by a more recent review of orientation programs, compiled by Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2004).

**Advising.** Initial contact with an academic advisor is the initiating of a potential relationship and resource that a student has access to throughout their academic career. Because of their role as a partner in creating goals and navigating the transition to university classes and schedules, advisors are important to the adjustment process (Baxter, 2003). As they fulfill their role they influence students' perceptions of university and their expectations of the academic and social aspects university life; these perceptions and expectations are then used when a student begins their first semester (Robinson et al., 1996). Partially because of the impact that academic advisors have on students' initial expectation development, Braxton and McClendon (2001) found that advising is one of the eight factors that influences student retention and engagement.

**Engagement.** Student engagement during orientation is the effort that institutions expend to organize activities and interaction opportunities for students. Engagement activities have been empirically linked to traditionally desired college outcomes (Kuh, 2009). In a study of 365 universities, Kuh and Zhao (2004) showed that student engagement and involvement in learning communities was positively associated with overall satisfaction with the college experience. One type of engagement is student-faculty interaction, which implies a link between the effectiveness of academic advising and student engagement levels (Frost, 1991; Kuh, 2009).

Based on the differences orientation components can have on the experience that a program produces for students, schools that have a goal for their orientation program will employ varying combinations of these components. There is a range of formats that are used, even within the state. The orientation format employed by Ball State's Honors College is a two-day program with individual advising meetings and high engagement levels.



**Study Format**

Due to a lack of previous research focused on an honors population, it was necessary to create a measure that focused on the aspects of orientation that are directly applicable to the demographic that is of current interest. Similar studies have been completed that assessed the expectation and satisfaction levels of students in the general university population. In a longitudinal study of 356 university students, it was shown that expectation levels before entering a university are linked to the type of adjustment that is made in later school years, and these adjustments were not linked to any measure other than initial expectation styles (Jackson et al., 2000). Another study examined the complexity of incoming student expectations, stress level, and amount of information from different sources about the university in 226 first-year students (Pancer et al., 2000). Pancer et al. (2000) found that more complex expectations typically indicated better adjustment to university life and stress. This study contained questionnaire items regarding sources of information about the university, which was linked to complexity of student expectations, and is a component that was included in the current study. When comparing two similar student satisfaction studies, Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006) found that when current perceptions and recalled expectations were measured at the end of a school term the fulfillment of the expectations was a reliable satisfaction predictor, but this reliability was not found when the same items were measured at the beginning of a school term. This finding supports the placement of the current study's posttest at the end of the target population's first semester at the university.

**The Current Study**

The goal of the current study is to compare the Honors College related expectations of students to their resulting satisfaction levels. Based on what is known about the link between

expectation and satisfaction (Oliver, 1980), as well as the importance of orientation for student satisfaction (Zhao, & Kuh, 2004), the study will measure general honors experience, honors residence life, honors advising, and interaction with faculty members before and after their initial university experience. It is hypothesized that students who have the most accurate expectations compared to their resulting experience levels will reach confirmation, and be the most satisfied. Accuracy can be described as the final expectation compared with the resulting first-year experience. Students who report low expectation levels in the pretest but good experiences on the posttest will have a corresponding disconfirmation, and low satisfaction. For students who report high expectation levels in the pretest and poor experiences on the posttest disconfirmation is expected along with low satisfaction.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

All participants were first-year freshmen students attending summer 2015 orientation before their first year as Ball State Honors students. There was no compensation for participation. Of the approximately 330 students who attended orientation at Ball State University, 228 volunteered as participants in the pretest. Data was collected from 61 of these 228 volunteer students for the follow-up posttest. More than half of the participants (67.5%) were female. The majority identified as Caucasian (93.4%), 2.6% were black, 0.9% were Hispanic/Latino, 1.3% were multiracial, and 1.8% were Asian/Pacific Islander. No participants identified as Native/ Indigenous American or Other. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 20 years, with a mean of 18.5 ( $SD = .26$ ) years of age. Indiana residents (78.9%) represented the majority of participants, and only 21.1% of participants were from out of state. When asked if they had visited the Ball State campus prior to their orientation experience 92.5% of participants

had visited at least one time. More than half of the participants (68%) reported that they did not have any immediate family members who had attended Ball State as a student.

### **Materials**

The current study was comprised of two surveys, a pretest and a posttest. The surveys were created with components from the 2014 Fall Freshman Orientation Program Evaluation for Students Inventory (Speer, 2014), as well as original components to accommodate for the lack of established measures focused on honors university students. Both the pretest and posttest questionnaires are included in the Appendix.

**Pretest survey.** Each participant was given a 35-item paper copy of a survey about demographics, expectation strength, expectation direction, and satisfaction level. To assess their expectations prior to their orientation experience students were asked, “*Whether they were positive or negative, how strong were your expectations of the Honors College program as a potential Honors student?*” Expectation strength was measured with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *not strong* (1) to *very strong* (5). As a supplemental item to each of their responses about the expectations they held, students were then asked to identify the positive or negative nature of each expectation, “*In regard to the Honors College program, which category did your expectations most accurately fit into?*” Expectation category was measured with a 3-point Likert scale ranging from *positive* to *negative*. Based on their orientation experience, participants could then report about the changed or unchanged nature of their expectations for each area of the Honors program when asked, “*In regard to the Honors College program, which category do your post-orientation expectations most accurately fit into?*” Final orientation expectation category was measured with a 3-point Likert scale ranging from *positive* to *negative*.



After being asked about their expectations and experiences, participants were asked to identify their satisfaction with the helpfulness, thoroughness, and value of each of the experiences by responding to items such as, *"To what degree were you satisfied with the academic planning session with an Honors Advisor to determine your schedule based on the curriculum (based on the indicated satisfaction criteria)?"* Expectation and satisfaction were assessed separately for each of the following categories: general honors experience, honors residence life, honors advising, interaction with faculty members, and an overall rating of orientation experience. Each satisfaction characteristic was measured by using 5-point Likert scale ranging from *not satisfied* (1) to *extremely satisfied* (5).

Qualitative data was collected via three short-response items regarding the orientation activities that participants perceived to be the "most beneficial" and the "least beneficial." Demographic questions included age, sex, ethnicity, state residency, previous exposure to Ball State, previous visits to the Ball State campus prior to orientation, and the method by which they learned of the university. See Appendix A for the full pretest survey.

**Posttest survey.** Each participant was given a 22-item survey about the similarity of their expectations to their university experience, the positive or negative nature of each experience, and satisfaction level. Survey items regarding the comparison of student expectation similarity to the reality of their experience asked, *"To what extent was your expectation of the Honors College program prior to college similar to what you have experienced in your first semester?"* Expectation similarity was measured with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *not similar* (1) to *extremely similar* (5). For each of the expectation similarity items, students were then asked to identify the positive, negative, or neutral nature of that experience when prompted with the



question, "*In regard to the Honors College program, which category do your experiences most accurately fit into?*"

After being asked about their expectations and experiences, participants were asked to identify their satisfaction with the helpfulness, thoroughness, and value of each of the experiences by responding to items such as, "*To what degree are you satisfied with the availability of necessary academic information from the Honors College?*" The expectation and satisfaction categories each included one item about general honors experience, honors residence life, honors advising, interaction with faculty members, and an overall rating of first semester experience. Each expectation similarity characteristic was measured by using five options ranging from *not similar* (1) to *extremely similar* (5). Each satisfaction characteristic was measured by using five options ranging from *not satisfied* (1) to *extremely satisfied* (5).

Qualitative data was collected via three short-response items regarding the honors experience that participants perceived to be the "most satisfying experience" and the "least satisfying experience." See Appendix B for the full posttest survey.

### **Procedure**

This study was designed in a pretest-posttest format in which the pretest survey was administered on paper in the summer of 2015 in the Ball Honors House, a building at Ball State University, and the posttest was completed online via Qualtrics software at the beginning of the spring 2016 semester. Students attending the second day of summer orientation at Ball State University were given the option to participate in the pretest survey after they completed their experience with the Honors College portion of orientation. They were presented with the informed consent form and the purpose of the study was read aloud to them by an Honors orientation staff member before they were asked to choose to participate or not. Surveys were

collected at the end of each day of orientation, and participants were randomly assigned an identification number so that their pretest scores could be confidentially compared to posttest scores.

For the posttest, an email was sent that contained the survey link to all Honors College students who previously participated in the pretest survey. They retained the same designated ID numbers for the posttest survey, which was stored separately from other data and raw scores so that the ID numbers and participant names could not be connected. There was approximately a 6-month period of time between the administration of the pretest and the posttest. After the online completion of the second survey, the participants had no additional time commitments.

## **Results**

### **Participants**

A total of 28 participants were excluded from participating in the pretest because they did not fall within the age requirement range of 18-20 years, and 2 were excluded for incomplete surveys in which less than half of the items were answered. Students who did not complete or were excluded from the pretest were consequently excluded from the posttest as well. These exclusions resulted in the pretest participation total of 228, and the posttest participation total of 61 first-year Honors College students. If participants completed the posttest Qualtrics survey more than one time, only the most recent complete set of responses was included. If participants selected two separate ethnicities, they were coded as multiracial.

### **Scale properties**

Four items on the posttest were recoded from the way they appeared on the Qualtrics survey. These four category items were measured on a 3-point scale about Honors College program experience, dorm experience, general college life experience, and academic life

experience. They were recoded before analysis of the scale in order to maintain consistent formatting with the pretest items with which these were analyzed.

An internal consistency estimate was computed for the four satisfaction items on the pretest. Cronbach's alpha was .705, indicating satisfactory reliability within the satisfaction portion of the pretest. An inter-scale reliability matrix was computed for these items, showing that deletion of any item from the scale would not produce significantly higher scale reliability. An internal consistency estimate was computed for the eight original expectation and post-orientation expectation items on the pretest. Cronbach's alpha was .690, indicating satisfactory reliability for a new measure within the expectation portion of the pretest. An inter-scale reliability matrix was computed for these items, showing that deletion of any item from the scale would not produce significantly higher scale reliability.

### **Hypothesis Testing**

**Orientation expectations.** T-tests were analyzed to determine if there were differences between original expectations and final orientation expectations had by students when leaving orientation. A paired samples t-test indicated that in the category of academic life, expectations were reported as being significantly more positive after orientation ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = 0.40$ ) than they were before orientation ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ),  $t(224) = -3.86$ ,  $p < .001$ . A paired samples t-test indicated that in the category of general university life, expectations were reported as significantly more positive after orientation ( $M = 2.90$ ,  $SD = 0.35$ ) than they were before orientation ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ),  $t(224) = -2.36$ ,  $p < .05$ . There were no significant differences for Honors College life or dorm life before and after orientation. Refer to Table 1 for all means, standard deviations, and t-test information.



Table 1

*Original and Post-orientation Expectations by Category and t-test Information*

Expectation Category	Original	Post-orientation	t-value (df)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
Academic Life	2.73 (0.52)	2.87 (0.40)	-3.86 (224)**
Dorm Life	2.76 (0.52)	2.80 (0.42)	-1.59 (224)
Honors College	2.91 (0.33)	2.93 (0.25)	-1.18 (224)
General University Life	2.84 (0.47)	2.90 (0.35)	-2.36 (224)*

Note. \* $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\* $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

Correlation coefficients were calculated for each of the four categories of expectations included in the paired samples t-test. There was a significant positive correlation between original and final orientation expectations for academic life,  $r = .39$ ,  $p < .001$  (one-tailed). A significant positive correlation was identified between original and final orientation expectations for dorm life,  $r = .62$ ,  $p < .001$  (one-tailed). There was a significant positive correlation between original and final orientation expectations for Honors College life,  $r = .35$ ,  $p < .001$  (one-tailed). A significant positive correlation was identified between original and final orientation expectations for general university life,  $r = .57$ ,  $p < .001$  (one-tailed).

**Expectations and Experiences.** T-tests were analyzed to determine if there were differences between final orientation expectations had by students when leaving orientation and student first-year experiences. A paired samples t-test indicated that in the category of academic life, students reported first semester experiences ( $M = 2.67$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ) as being significantly less positive than their reported expectations at the end of orientation ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ),  $t(60) =$



2.45,  $p < .05$ . A paired samples t-test indicated that in the category of Honors College, students reported first semester experiences ( $M = 2.66$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ) as being significantly less positive than their reported expectations at the end of orientation ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 0.25$ ),  $t(60) = 3.42$ ,  $p = .001$ . There were no significant differences for general university life or dorm between the end of orientation and first semester experiences. Refer to Table 2 for all means, standard deviations, and t-test information.

Table 2

*Post-orientation Expectations and Experience by Category and t-test Information*

Category	Post-orientation	Experience	t-value (df)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
Academic Life	2.87 (0.39)	2.67 (0.54)	-3.86 (60)*
Dorm Life	2.82 (0.43)	2.84 (0.42)	-1.59 (60)
Honors College	2.93 (0.25)	2.66 (0.57)	-1.18 (60)**
General University Life	2.87 (0.43)	2.89 (0.32)	-2.36 (60)

Note. \* $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\* $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

Correlation coefficients were calculated for each of the four categories of expectations and experiences included in the paired samples t-test. There was a significant positive correlation between final orientation expectation and experience for general university life,  $r = .25$ ,  $p < .05$  (one-tailed). The correlation between final orientation expectation and experience for dorm life was not significant,  $r = .11$ ,  $p > .10$ . The correlation between final orientation expectation and experience for academic life was not significant,  $r = .11$ ,  $p > .10$ . The correlation between final

orientation expectation and experience for Honors College life was not significant,  $r = -0.04$ ,  $p > .10$

To test the hypotheses that the confirmation and disconfirmation created by experience and expectation differences were related to resulting satisfaction, correlation coefficients were calculated individually from each of the four categories' difference scores (final orientation expectation subtracted from experience) and the posttest satisfaction items that relate to each category. There was a significant positive correlation between the dorm life difference score and experience with honors dorms and facilities,  $r = .37$ ,  $p < .01$  (one-tailed). There was a significant positive correlation between the honors academic life difference score and experience with honors classes and curriculum,  $r = .27$ ,  $p < .05$  (one-tailed). The correlation between the Honors College program difference score and experience with accessibility and interaction with Honors faculty, advisors, and professors was not significant,  $r = .19$ ,  $p > .05$  (one-tailed). The correlation between general university life and experience was not significant,  $r = .15$ ,  $p > .10$  (one-tailed).

### **Satisfaction Levels**

Satisfaction self-reports for activities during orientation and means for related experiences during first semester were collected using a 5-point Likert scale. At orientation students were most satisfied with the academic planning session ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ), followed by the housing information ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ), and Honors information session ( $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ). Students were least satisfied with the afternoon reception at orientation ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ).

After their first semester experiences students were most satisfied with the Honors facilities and dorm ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ), followed by the availability of the advisors and faculty ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ), and academic information availability ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ). Students

were least satisfied with their experiences with the curriculum and class format of Honors Classes ( $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ). Refer to Figure 1 for a visual representation of the frequency of experiences first-year students reported as *most satisfying* or *least satisfying*.

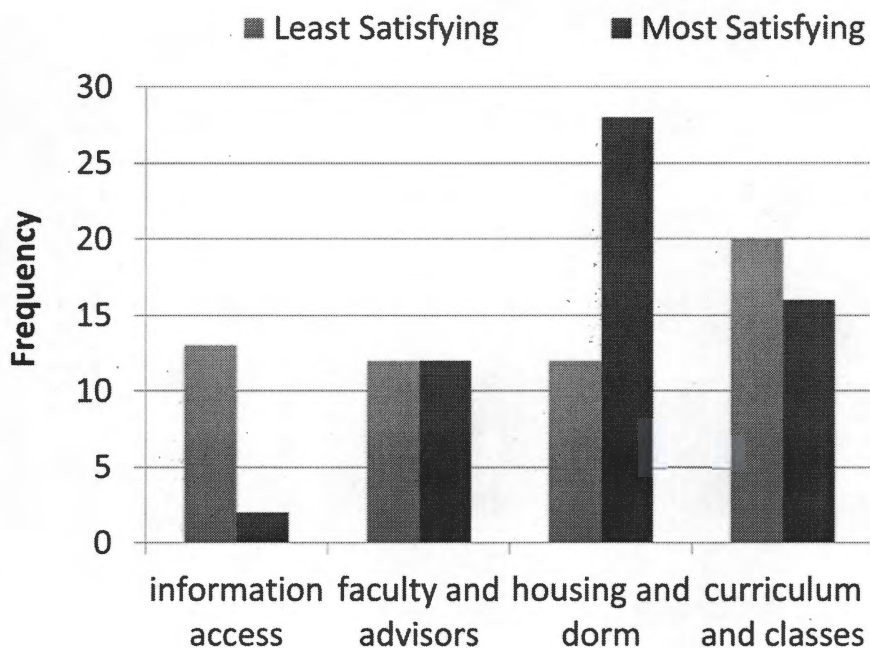


Figure 1. Posttest data comparison of most satisfying and least satisfying honors related experiences in the first semester.

### Exploratory Testing

Correlation coefficients were calculated to determine if there were any relationships between preparedness for life as an Honors College student and the four similarity scores. There was a significant negative correlation between preparedness and similarity of academic life,  $r = -.27$ ,  $p < .05$  (one-tailed). A significant negative correlation was found between preparedness and similarity of Honors College program,  $r = -.24$ ,  $p < .05$  (one-tailed). Neither of the correlations between preparedness and dorm life,  $r = -.10$ ,  $p > .05$ , or preparedness and general university

life,  $r = -.14$ ,  $p > .05$ , were significant. Refer to Table 3 for all coefficients and significance levels in the correlation matrix.

Table 3  
*Expectation Similarity Score Correlation Information*

	Overall prepared	Academic life similarity	Dorm life similarity	General University life similarity	Honors College program similarity
Overall prepared	1.000	-.270*	-.098	-.137	-.242*
Academic life similarity	-.270*	1.000	0.332**	0.425**	0.554**
Dorm life similarity	-.098	0.332**	1.000	0.436**	0.199
General University life similarity	-.137	0.425**	0.436**	1.000	0.268*
Honors College program similarity	-.242*	0.554**	0.199	0.268*	1.000

Note. \* $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\* $p < .01$ , one-tailed.

Correlation coefficients were calculated to determine if there were any relationships between preparedness and the difference between post-orientation expectation and first semester experience for each of the four categories. The correlation between preparedness and these items was not significant. Refer to Table 4 for all coefficients and significance levels in the correlation matrix.



Table 4

*Expectation and Experience Difference Score Correlation Information*

	Overall prepared	Academic life expectation score	Dorm life expectation score	General University life expectation score	Honors College expectation score
Overall prepared	1.000	-.017	0.024	-.207	-.035
Academic life difference score	-.017	1.000	0.293*	0.240*	0.830**
Dorm life difference score	0.024	0.293*	1.000	0.381**	0.355*
General University life difference score	-.207	0.240*	0.381**	1.000	0.168
Honors College difference score	-.035	0.830**	0.355*	0.168	1.000

Note. \* $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\* $p < .01$ , one-tailed.

Difference scores for post-orientation expectations minus original expectations for academic life, dorm life, Honors College program, and general university life were entered simultaneously into a multiple regression model predicting overall satisfaction with orientation. Overall, the four predictor variables together accounted for a significant amount of variability in satisfaction  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(4, 220) = 2.87$ ,  $p < .05$ . There was a significant and positive beta weight for dorm life ( $B = .201$ ).

A stepwise multiple regression was conducted to evaluate whether the similarity of students' experiences to their post-orientation expectations for all four activities including

general university, academic life, dorm life, and Honors College program was needed to predict how much of their preparedness for college the students attributed to the summer orientation program. At step 1, preparedness regressed on academic life similarity. This overall model accounted for a significant portion of preparedness,  $R^2 = .073$ ,  $F(1, 59) = 4.63$ ,  $p < .05$ . Only academic life similarity ( $B = -.270$ ) was a significant predictor in this model.

Demographic information that could potentially have impacted the participants' expectation or satisfaction levels was collected. A few correlations were identified as significant during exploratory analyses; however, none of these impacted the hypotheses of the current study or accounted for significantly more variability within the sample. The correlation coefficients for exploratory items such as residency, prior visits to the Ball State campus, and immediate relationships to alumni are detailed in Table 5.

Table 5

*Exploratory Demographic and Satisfaction Correlation Information*

	Alumni family members	Prior BSU visits	Residency	Orientation overall satisfied
Alumni family members	1.000	0.126*	0.139*	-.019
Prior BSU visits	0.126*	1.000	0.022	0.004
Residency	0.139*	0.022	1.000	0.106*
Orientation overall satisfied	-.019	0.004	0.106*	1.000

Note. \* $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\* $p < .01$ , one-tailed.

### Discussion

The current study used a new measure, partially derived from the 2014 Fall Freshman Orientation Program Evaluation for Students Inventory created by Speer (2014), to collect data regarding first-year Honors College students' expectations, expectation similarity, preparedness for life as an Honors College student, and satisfaction levels at three stages in the orientation process. The intent of the current study was to determine if the Subjective Disconfirmation Theory detailed in Oliver (1977) could explain the changes in perception for different categories of experiences held by first-year students as they initially had expectations of each category, then learned about each category at orientation, and finally experienced them during the fall 2015 semester at Ball State University. There were three hypotheses made in this exploratory study. The exploration of this connection was a new one given that the Subjective Disconfirmation Theory has not previously been applied to a sample of students in regard to their expectations and experiences. First, the literature suggests that expectations of college students are related to experience satisfaction (Athiyaman, 1997); therefore, it was hypothesized that students with the most accurate expectations compared to their resulting experience levels would reach confirmation to become the most satisfied. Accuracy was defined as the final expectation after orientation compared with first-year experience scores. Second, it was hypothesized that students who reported low expectation levels in the pretest but positive experiences on the post-test would have a corresponding disconfirmation and low satisfaction. Finally, the third hypothesis stated that for students who reported high expectation levels in the pretest but had poor experiences on the posttest, disconfirmation was expected along with low satisfaction.



### Implications

Based on t-test data there was confirmation identified for two categories: honors dorm life and general university life. The first hypothesis was partially supported: the correlation results for honors dorm life indicated that confirmation was positively related to satisfaction, but findings for general university life did not show this same relationship. There were no instances of positive disconfirmation found in the data set, indicating that there were no occurrences of low expectations paired with more positive experiences. This lack of any positive disconfirmation pattern prevented hypothesis two from being tested with the data and sample from the current study. A t-test identified academic life and Honors College life as the two categories that show a negative disconfirmation. The third hypothesis was not supported: the academic life results demonstrated a positive relationship between academic difference scores and resulting satisfaction, and there was no relationship between Honors College program difference scores and satisfaction.

Exploratory analyses were conducted to determine if any interactions between participant perceptions were present that had not been hypothesized. Based on a regression model, it is possible to predict student's perception of their preparedness for life as an Honors College student with similarity variables. Overall orientation satisfaction was possible to predict from the difference scores that were calculated to measure how much change occurred in expectations of each category.

Only one category, honors dorm life, supported the hypothesized connection of Subjective Disconfirmation Theory's ability to evaluate the Ball State University's Honors College orientation program. This indicates that the accuracy of expectation for dorm life is important to students' resulting satisfaction with dorm life, but it is unclear whether this relationship



generalizes to other constructs. Issues that can be explored in future research may help to explain the lack of significant findings for the other three categories investigated in the current study.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Because the current study is unique in its attempt to ascertain expectation and satisfaction information from an Honors College subgroup of a university population through the lens of subjective disconfirmation theory, it provides a new connection that allows for categorization of the impact of orientation. However, there were limitations in the methodology of the study. The large amount of pretest participants compared to the decreased number of posttest participants indicates a high attrition rate, which is common in longitudinal studies, but can limit the generalizability of the findings and application of any supported hypotheses. In this situation, there may have been a difference between the students who chose to participate in both surveys, which may account for the effects that were found. The current study also did not include those first-year Honors students who were under the age of 18 at the beginning of orientation. This demographic limitation reduced the percentage of students who were able to volunteer for each survey. Due to participants completing the pre-test in the Honors College building on campus immediately following orientation, there was a risk of social desirability bias. Regardless of the clear message that was presented to the participants that no faculty or staff associated with the Honors College would have access to their responses, this bias must be taken into consideration when interpreting the results of the current study. The pretest was distributed during the second day of orientation, but items included on it inquired about both expectations before orientation and after orientation, which results in a potential for retroactive interference. The participants' final orientation expectation could have impacted their recall ability of original expectations. Although the current methodology was chosen based on student scheduling during

orientation, this limitation could be accounted for in any future work by dividing the pretest into two sessions: one at the beginning of orientation, and one at the conclusion of the second day.

### **Future Research**

Future research may compare how varying types of orientation formats impact the findings from the current study. Honors students and other subgroups of the general student population who have different orientation experiences may have coinciding differences in the amount of influence orientation has on original expectations as well as on the similarity of what they expect after orientation to their first-year experiences. To accommodate for differences in orientation format, there would need to be modifications made to the current pretest and posttest surveys. Researchers at Indiana State University created a survey called the CSEQ (College Student Experiences Questionnaire) and the CSXQ (College Student Expectations Questionnaire) to measure many of the same expectation concepts in the general university population as the current study measured with Honors College students (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2004).). The CSEQ was not modified for use in the current study for an Honors College student population due to its focus on activities and expectations without the inclusion of perceptions or satisfaction levels; however, like the survey created at Ball State University by Speer (2014), the CSEQ survey may be useful in making adaptations to the current pretest and posttest because of its established validity and reliability with a large general population on expectation concepts.

It may be advantageous in future research to examine expectations and satisfaction further by breaking the categories used in the current study into more specific constructs. Altering the breadth of the categories to be narrower may account for some of the inconclusive findings in expectation by separating any conflicting perceptions that were grouped together in

the categories used in the current study. For example, the category of academic life may be divided into curriculum, professors, coursework, and classroom atmosphere in order to determine the most accurate findings based on more specific expectations.

It would be beneficial to continue gathering data from participants for the duration of the time that each Honors College cohort is enrolled in undergraduate coursework. Expanding the findings to a longitudinal format to follow students through to graduation would make it possible to determine if there are any long-term implications of the adjustment process from orientation to the first year. For example, factors such as graduation rate, number of years needed to complete a degree, or satisfaction with the program could be measured in this way.

The individual experience, amount each student was engaged, and amount of involvement in both orientation and the first semester may mediate student expectations and satisfaction levels. Therefore, including separate and direct questions about engagement at orientation and in the follow-up posttest would provide information about what role engagement fills in the relationship between expectation and satisfaction levels. Kuh and Zhao (2004) found that student engagement and involvement was linked to satisfaction with the college experience, which provides reasonable support for including it as its own construct in future research to determine if this relationship extends to satisfaction with orientation. Particularly, the availability and interaction with faculty that was measured in the current pretest and posttest survey should be measured in relation to engagement based on the importance of student-faculty interaction engagement identified in previous studies (Frost, 1991; Kuh, 2009).

The current study was exploratory in nature, and intended to compare the two previously unconnected concepts of education program evaluation and Subjective Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980). Future research is needed to continue investigating if this connection could be

useful for program evaluation and feedback. Although honors dorm life confirmation supported the hypothesized theoretical connection and orientation satisfaction could be predicted from the change in student expectations, more information is necessary to properly evaluate the complexities and long-term impact of student experiences with a university orientation program.



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## Appendix A

**For the following demographic questions and questions about your knowledge of Ball State, please choose the answer that is most accurate for you.**

1. What was your age at your last birthday?

\_\_\_\_\_ years

2. What is your sex?

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Transgender
- d. Other

3. What is your ethnicity?

- a. White/ American European/ Caucasian
- b. Black/ African American
- c. Hispanic/ Latino (a)
- d. Asian/ Pacific Islander
- e. Native/ Indigenous American
- f. Multiracial
- g. Other (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4. What was your residency at the time of high school graduation?

- a. In-state residency (Indiana)
- b. Out-of-state residency
- c. International

5. Do you have immediate family members who have attended, or are currently attending, Ball State University as a student?

- a. Yes
- b. No

6. Prior to orientation, had you visited the Ball State campus?

- a. Yes
- b. No

7. How did you first learn of Ball State prior to applying?

- a. Advertising from the university (TV, paper mail, etc.)
- b. At a college fair
- c. From a family member who attended the university
- d. From high school faculty
- e. Other



**For the following questions about your time at orientation, please choose the most accurate answer from your own experience.**

8. Overall, how satisfied were you with the Ball State University Honors College orientation program?

- a. Not Satisfied
- b. Slightly Satisfied
- c. Moderately Satisfied
- d. Very Satisfied
- e. Extremely Satisfied

9. As a result of attending orientation, you feel prepared to succeed at Ball State.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

**The following questions are intended to measure your expectations of Ball State Honors College life before your time at orientation. The strength of your expectations reflects how sure you are of what you expect. The positive or negative evaluation of those expectations is a separate measure that is meant to determine if you personally view those expectations as "good" or "bad," respectively. Please choose the most accurate answer from your own experience.**

10. How strong was your expectation of general university life at Ball State as a member of the Honors College before you attended orientation?

- a. Not Strong
- b. Slightly Strong
- c. Undecided
- d. Moderately Strong
- e. Very Strong

11. In regard to general university life, which category did your expectations most accurately fit into?

- a. Positive
- b. Negative
- c. Neutral

12. Whether they were positive or negative, how strong were your expectations of the Honors College program as a potential Honors student?

- a. Not Strong
- b. Slightly Strong
- c. Undecided
- d. Moderately Strong
- e. Very Strong

13. In regard to the Honors College program, which category did your expectations most accurately fit into?

- a. Positive
- b. Negative
- c. Neutral

14. Whether they were positive or negative, how strong were your expectations of the dorm life as a potential Honors student?

- a. Not Strong
- b. Slightly Strong
- c. Undecided
- d. Moderately Strong
- e. Very Strong

15. In regard to the Honors dorm life, which category did your expectations most accurately fit into?

- a. Positive
- b. Negative
- c. Neutral

16. Whether they were positive or negative, how strong were your expectations of the academic life (i.e. class work, class format, scheduling) as a potential Honors student?

- a. Not Strong
- b. Slightly Strong
- c. Undecided
- d. Moderately Strong
- e. Very Strong

17. In regard to the Honors academic life, which category did your expectations most accurately fit into?

- a. Positive
- b. Negative
- c. Neutral

**The following questions are intended to measure your expectations of Ball State Honors College life after your time at orientation. Please choose the most accurate answer from your own experience.**

18. How similar was the description of the Ball State Honors College that you heard at orientation to the description (s) that you had heard prior to orientation?

- a. Not Similar
- b. Slightly Similar
- c. Moderately Similar
- d. Very Similar
- e. Extremely Similar

19. In regard to general university life, which category do your post-orientation expectations most accurately fit into?

- a. Positive
- b. Negative
- c. Neutral

20. In regard to the Honors College program, which category do your post-orientation expectations most accurately fit into?

- a. Positive
- b. Negative
- c. Neutral

21. In regard to the Honors dorm life, which category do your post-orientation expectations most accurately fit into?

- a. Positive
- b. Negative
- c. Neutral

22. In regard to the Honors academic life, which category do your post-orientation expectations most accurately fit into?

- a. Positive
- b. Negative
- c. Neutral

23. Now that you have completed orientation, how likely is it that you plan to continue your commitment to attend Ball State Honors College?

- a. Not Likely
- b. Slightly Likely
- c. Moderately Likely
- d. Very Likely
- e. Extremely Likely

24. After your experience with Ball State Honors orientation, how positive or negative do you expect your first year of college to be?

- a. Very Negative
- b. Moderately Negative
- c. Neutral
- d. Moderately Positive
- e. Very Positive

25. As a result of your preparatory experiences at orientation, how strongly do you feel prepared to succeed at Ball State?

- a. Not Strong
- b. Slightly Strong
- c. Undecided
- d. Moderately Strong
- e. Very Strong

26. Overall, how prepared do you feel that the summer orientation program made you for life as an Honors College student?

- a. Very Prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Neutral
- d. Somewhat unprepared
- e. Very Unprepared



**For the following questions, please indicate how satisfied you were with each portion of the Honors College orientation program based on its *helpfulness*, *thoroughness*, and *college prep value* to you as a student.**

27. To what degree were you satisfied with the Honors information session with the Dean, Honors Advisor, and student representative (based on the indicated satisfaction criteria)?

- a. Not Satisfied
- b. Slightly Satisfied
- c. Moderately Satisfied
- d. Very Satisfied
- e. Extremely Satisfied

28. To what degree were you satisfied with the academic planning session with an Honors Advisor to determine your schedule based on the curriculum (based on the indicated satisfaction criteria)?

- a. Not Satisfied
- b. Slightly Satisfied
- c. Moderately Satisfied
- d. Very Satisfied
- e. Extremely Satisfied

29. To what degree are you satisfied with the Honors housing information that you have received about the honors dorm and other facilities available to you (based on the indicated satisfaction criteria)?

- a. Not Satisfied
- b. Slightly Satisfied
- c. Moderately Satisfied
- d. Very Satisfied
- e. Extremely Satisfied

30. To what degree were you satisfied with the opportunity to meet with the Dean at the afternoon reception in the Honors House (based on the indicated satisfaction criteria)?

- a. Not Satisfied
- b. Slightly Satisfied
- c. Moderately Satisfied
- d. Very Satisfied
- e. Extremely Satisfied

31. Which of these activities during the two-day orientation experience have been the *least* beneficial to you as a future student?

- a. Honors information session
- b. Academic planning session
- c. Honors housing information
- d. Afternoon reception at Honors House

32. Based on your answer to the previous question: Why was that activity the least beneficial in your opinion?

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33. Which of these events during the two-day orientation experience have been the *most* beneficial to you as a future student?

- a. Honors information session
- b. Academic planning session
- c. Honors housing information
- d. Afternoon reception at Honors House

34. Based on your answer to the previous question: Why was that activity the most beneficial in your opinion?

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35. What other opportunities or services could have been provided during the orientation program to assist you in your transition to college?

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## Appendix B

**The following questions are intended to measure your experiences in the Ball State Honors College during the Fall 2015 semester, as a follow up to the survey that you completed during summer orientation. Please choose the most accurate answer from your own experience.**

1. How similar was the description of the Ball State Honors College that you heard at orientation to the reality of your experiences in the program as a first semester freshman?

- a. Not Similar
- b. Slightly Similar
- c. Moderately Similar
- d. Very Similar
- e. Extremely Similar

2. In regard to general university life, which category do your experiences most accurately fit into?

- d. Positive
- e. Negative
- f. Neutral

3. To what extent was your expectation of general university life prior to college similar to what you have experienced in your first semester?

- a. Not Similar
- b. Slightly Similar
- c. Moderately Similar
- d. Very Similar
- e. Extremely Similar

4. In regard to the Honors College program, which category do your experiences most accurately fit into?

- d. Positive
- e. Negative
- f. Neutral

5. To what extent was your expectation of the Honors College program prior to college similar to what you have experienced in your first semester?

- a. Not Similar
- b. Slightly Similar
- c. Moderately Similar

- d. Very Similar
- e. Extremely Similar

6. In regard to the Honors dorm, which category do your experiences most accurately fit into?

- d. Positive
- e. Negative
- f. Neutral

7. To what extent was your expectation of Honors College dorm life prior to college similar to what you have experienced in your first semester?

- a. Not Similar
- b. Slightly Similar
- c. Moderately Similar
- d. Very Similar
- e. Extremely Similar

8. In regard to the Honors academic life, which category do your experiences most accurately fit into?

- d. Positive
- e. Negative
- f. Neutral

9. To what extent was your expectation of Honors College academic life prior to college similar to what you have experienced in your first semester?

- a. Not Similar
- b. Slightly Similar
- c. Moderately Similar
- d. Very Similar
- e. Extremely Similar

10. Now that you have completed the majority of your first semester, how likely is it that you plan to continue your commitment as a Ball State Honors student?

- a. Not Likely
- b. Slightly Likely
- c. Moderately Likely
- d. Very Likely
- e. Extremely Likely



11. After your initial experience with Ball State Honors, how positively or negatively do you expect the remainder of your undergraduate college life to be?

- a. Very Negative
- b. Moderately Negative
- c. Neutral
- d. Moderately Positive
- e. Very Positive

12. Overall, how prepared do you feel that the summer orientation program made you for life as an Honors College student?

- f. Very Prepared
- g. Somewhat prepared
- h. Neutral
- i. Somewhat unprepared
- j. Very Unprepared

**For the following questions, please indicate how satisfied you were with each portion of the Honors College program during your first semester based on its *helpfulness, thoroughness, and value* to you as a student.**

13. To what degree are you satisfied with the availability of necessary academic information from the Honors College?

- a. Not Satisfied
- b. Slightly Satisfied
- c. Moderately Satisfied
- d. Very Satisfied
- e. Extremely Satisfied

14. To what degree are you satisfied with the amount of access you had to your Honors Advisor, Honors College professors, and the Deans?

- a. Not Satisfied
- b. Slightly Satisfied
- c. Moderately Satisfied
- d. Very Satisfied
- e. Extremely Satisfied

15. To what degree are you satisfied with the Honors dorm and other facilities that have been available to you during your first semester?

- a. Not Satisfied
- b. Slightly Satisfied
- c. Moderately Satisfied
- d. Very Satisfied
- e. Extremely Satisfied

16. To what degree are you satisfied with the curriculum and class format of your Honors classes?

- a. Not Satisfied
- b. Slightly Satisfied
- c. Moderately Satisfied
- d. Very Satisfied
- e. Extremely Satisfied

17. As a result of your preparatory experiences at orientation and your first semester, how strongly do you feel prepared to succeed at Ball State?

- a. Not Strong
- b. Slightly Strong
- c. Undecided
- d. Moderately Strong
- e. Very Strong

18. Which of these aspects of your Honors experience have been the *least* satisfying to you as a student?

- e. Honors information updates/availability
- f. Honors faculty and advisor assistance
- g. Honors dorm and housing
- h. Honors curriculum and class format

19. Based on your answer to the previous question: Why was that activity the least satisfying in your opinion?

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20. Which of these aspects of your Honors experience have been the *most* satisfying to you as a student?

- a. Honors information updates/availability
- b. Honors faculty and advisor assistance
- c. Honors dorm and housing
- d. Honors curriculum and class format

21. Based on your answer to the previous question: Why was that activity the most satisfying in your opinion?

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22. What other opportunities or services could have been provided during the summer orientation prior to your time as a student to assist you in your transition to college?

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